

Podocarpus macrophyllus: Podocarpus¹

Edward F. Gilman, Dennis G. Watson, Ryan W. Klein, and Deborah R. Hilbert²

Introduction

With densely foliated lower limbs which reach the ground, and neat, dark green, evergreen leaves, podocarpus is very popular as a dense screen or hedge. However, podocarpus can reach 35 to 50 feet in height when not sheared and is quite attractive as a tree with the lower branches removed, revealing the light brown, peeling bark. The crown of this columnar variety remains tight and does not open up like the species. It could be used in spaces where there is limited room for expansion of the crown. The inconspicuous flowers are followed by fleshy, purple, small, edible fruits (very good to eat) on female trees which are quite attractive to birds but not really messy on sidewalks or pavement. Leaves are recurved, unlike the straight leaves on the species.

General Information

Scientific name: *Podocarpus macrophyllus*

Pronunciation: poe-doe-KAR-pus mack-ro-e-FILL-us

Common name(s): Podocarpus

Family: *Podocarpaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: not native to North America

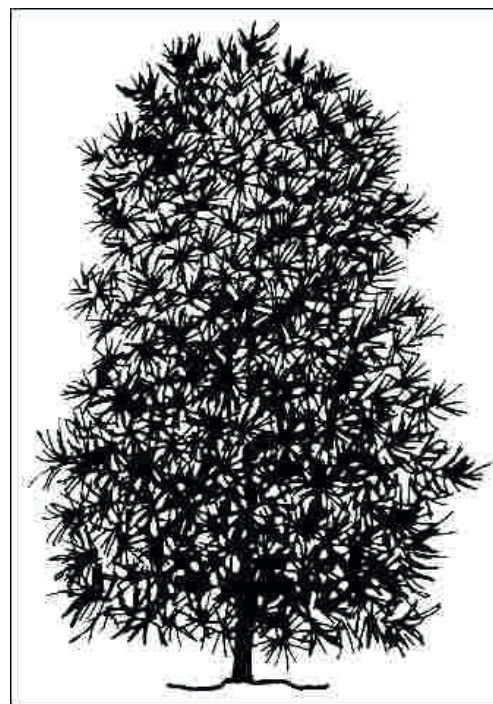


Figure 1. Young *Podocarpus macrophyllus*: Podocarpus.
Credits: UF/IFAS

Invasive potential: not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North, Central, South)

Uses: highway median; screen; street without sidewalk; specimen; shade; espalier; hedge; reclamation; container or planter; deck or patio; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100–200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft;

1. This document is ENH655, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006 and March 2024. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering; Ryan W. Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture; and Deborah R. Hilbert, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center; Department of Environmental Horticulture; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3–4 feet wide; tree lawn 4–6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; urban tolerant; indoors

Availability: not native to North America



Figure 2. Range.
Credits: UF/IFAS

Description

Height: 35 to 40 feet

Spread: 10 to 15 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Figure 3)

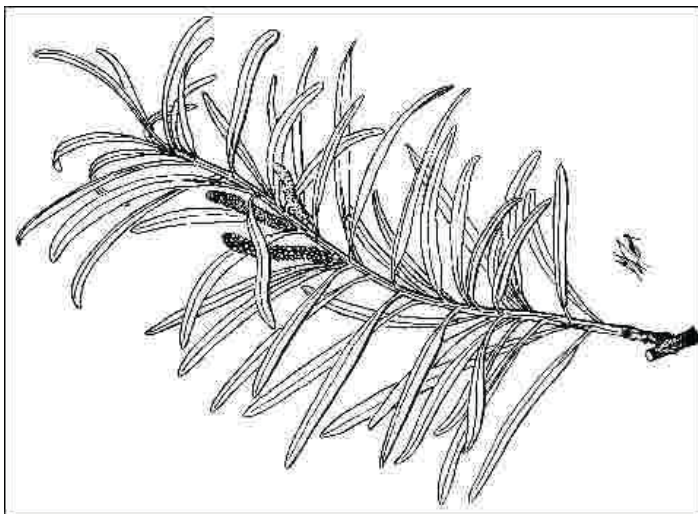


Figure 3. Foliage.
Credits: UF/IFAS

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches, 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: irregular, round, oval

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: purple

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: medium, thick

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade, shade tolerant

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

This is one of a few trees which can be pruned into a nice hedge. The dark green foliage and dense growth creates a formal mass. It looks better when pruned with a hand pruner, not sheared with a hedge trimmer.

Showing best growth and form in full sun, podocarpus will grow more slowly and have a looser appearance when grown in shade. It will grow on the north side of a tall building with little or no direct sun. It will tolerate a wide variety of well-drained, acidic soils. Don't plant on wet soils. This is a tough tree, adaptable to urban conditions and should be used much more extensively as a street tree. It should be used more in areas of poor soils and restricted rooting space. Unfortunately, most people choose to trim the tree into a column or hedge, so not many have seen the true beauty of the tree. It will make an attractive specimen, street or parking lot tree, even for the smallest soil space in a downtown planting pit. Roots are not a problem in restricted-soil planting areas and usually do not lift sidewalks.

Many varieties are available for selection of habit, leaf form, color, etc. *Podocarpus macrophyllus* var. *appressus* is a low shrub with short leaves; *Podocarpus macrophyllus* var. *maki* has erect branches, columnar form, 1.5- to 3-inch-long leaves.

Propagation is by seeds or cuttings. Hardwood cuttings root easily. Cutting propagation would ensure more uniform trees than seedlings. Nursery operators should be

encouraged to grow podocarpus in the single-trunked tree form for planting in urban landscapes.

Pests and Diseases

Occasionally bothered by scale, mites, and sooty mold but not seriously. Some magnesium-deficiency on sandy soil, which is easily corrected with magnesium sulfate.